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# 'I don't want to become a rules cop': An Organizational Culture and Leadership Discourse Analysis of the NPDA as a Failed Organization

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## Abstract

On March 23, 2010 Dr. Robert Trapp, former President of the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), posted a message to the parli listserve (parli-l) suggesting the final round of the national tournament lacked the substance and nuance that the community should see in debate. Trapp's post reflects a larger issue in the NPDA—the emergent divide and disparate organizational cultures emerging over the organization's short lifetime. This paper investigates the often discussed, but still under-developed relationship between leadership and culture in mission-based organizations by analyzing the discourse of cultural leadership in the NPDA from 1994 to 1999. Findings suggest that the organizational challenges in the NPDA today are strongly linked to failures in the organization's early leaders to codify the shared values and mission of the organization. In fact, the leaders seemed to actively create a discourse of disdain for official clarity in organizational mission and purpose during its formative years. Theoretical and future implications are discussed.

*Keywords: NPDA, parli-l, organizational culture, organizational leadership*

## Introduction

To read a history of the National Parliamentary Debate Association's formation (Johnson, Johnson, & Trapp, 1999) is to read a story of a grassroots organization. Yet conspicuously absent from this history is a strong focus on the mission or shared values of the NPDA as an 'audience-centered' style of debate—what emerges from the history is a structural accounting of the organization's formation and rapid growth. The same collaborators who formed the organization and wrote its history also have academic publications about the centrality of audience-centered accessible debate in NPDA (Johnson, 1997; Trapp, 1996; Trapp, 2000). However, these collaborators largely rejected the codification of rules and organizational structures that would preserve the mission and vision of the NPDA during their tenure as presidents of the NPDA during the organization's formative years.

As we look at the state of the NPDA today, we see an organization whose participation has—at the very least—leveled off and also faced serious decline in some geographic regions; we see an organization with substantial internal conflict (Snider, 2008); and we see an activity that barely resembles the mission or vision described in early writings about parliamentary debate. In fact, the NPDA has no 'official' statement of goals (Amsden, 2003). Nearly the only thing remaining of the NPDA, as a style of debate, are the very broad guidelines identifying time limits and general tournament procedures codified in 1995. In

fact, if we 'Google' the rules of the NPDA the only search results point to a broad description of the activity as 'two on two' limited preparation-style of debate that does not allow prepared materials to be used during the debate and the time limits (Anonymous). This suggests that if we want to understand the evolution of the NPDA, as an organization, we have to examine the foundational discussions that shaped the norms, values, and priorities in the NPDA—that is public discussions about the organization's formation, structure, and priorities. Previous research has clearly identified there is a disconnect between the espoused values of the NPDA and the values of the judges, coaches, and competitors with regards to what occurs or should occur within a round of debate (Amsden, 2003; Diers & Birkholt, 2004). Yet there is no research or analysis connecting the values, goals, and priorities of the members with the pervasive organizational culture or founding leadership of the organization, despite organizational researchers' findings that organizational leaders are critical in shaping the discourse and values of an emergent organization (Applbaum, 1999 485; Beyer & Browning, 1999; Bryman, 1999; Gill, Levine, & Pitt, 1998; Mills, 1995).

It is with this backdrop that when I read Dr. Trapp's posting on the parli-l (see Appendix A)— in March, 2010 lamenting the style and structure of 'modern' parliamentary debate, I could not help but see the irony in his concerns about the style and content of the debate and its relationship to public discourse because it was Dr. Trapp who, as the NPDA's president mused in 1997 that, "… my primary reaction is that I don't want to become a rules cop" in reference to a thread on the then active parli-l addressing organizational policy questions relating to the use of preparation time.

No matter whether those involved in the intercollegiate forensics community like or dislike the state of the NPDA parliamentary debate, view the changes associated with the emergence of the NPTE (National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence) as positive for the activity, or yearn for days gone by; there is no denying that the organization has fundamentally failed to support its espoused central mission and is presently struggling to identify itself. In this issue, I believe there are rich organizational leadership and organizational culture lessons to be learned. Therefore, instead of addressing the relative value of the changes in the NPDA my purpose in this paper is to examine the NPDA from an organizational perspective to identify the communicative problems that facilitated the 'unintended' changes in the activity so forensics organizations can better frame and address issues of purpose and goals, particularly in environments where our programs must increasingly justify their existence and benefit to our academic institutions. In so doing, this analysis addresses a critical weakness in the leadership and culture literature by explicitly exploring the leadership culture connection (Banntu-Gomez & Rohrer, 2011).

## The Intersection of Organizational Culture and Leadership

As Diers and Birkholt (2004) argue, the practice of debate often advances faster than the theoretical grounding and organizational responses to emergent practices. This argument is in line with findings regarding geographically dis-

persed organizations (Diers & Birkholt, 2002). In fact, Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) argue one of the challenges that such organizations face is that organizational members must identify with one another, with the organization, and with the organization's values in order for the organization to remain intact and viable. Moreover, they assert strong positive communication interactions underscore the long-term effectiveness of geographically dispersed organizations. Welleford and Dudley (2000), however, identify a tension between strong identity and keeping an organization's values relevant for members, suggesting that active dialogues about the organization's direction, purposes, and practices are critical an organization's identity and relevance. Underscoring this tension is the important role leaders serve in developing, maintaining, and facilitating change in the shared values of an organization (Amernic & Craig, 2007; Banntu-Gomez & Rohrer, 2011). In this brief review of foundational literature addressing the leadership cultural connection, my goal is to establish a viable model for analyzing the leadership culture connection appropriate for a mission-driven organization like the NPDA.

**Defining Organizational Culture**
Conceptually, when we are talking about identity, mission, practices, and communication, we are necessarily addressing issues of organizational culture. Trice and Beyer (1993) explain that organizations:

> …arrive at their shared ideologies through collective experience and repeated social interactions over time. They use cultural forms to communicate and reinforce these shared ideologies. Organizational cultures, like other cultures, develop as groups of people struggle together to make sense of and cope with their worlds. (p. 4)

In this definition of organizational culture, Trice and Beyer (1993) emphasize that culture is a compilation of an organization's ideologies, which are hard to measure in typical research language, but that those ideologies are made concrete in the forms the culture takes on including the symbols communicated, language used in the organization, narratives told, and the routine practices of members. Trice and Beyer's conceptualization of culture suggests culture is created, maintained, and changed in the communicative processes within an organization (Hatch, 2000).

This approach to analyzing organizational culture is particularly relevant for the NPDA because organizations that fail to create a shared identity are less likely to build and maintain commitment to the organization's mission and are ultimately more likely to fail in the long run (Bennington, Shetler, & Shaw, 2003; Bodkin, Amato, & Peters, 2009). The NPDA is an organization that was formed as coaches from different genres of debate competition, unsatisfied with the practices that had become normative in other organizations, collaborated to develop a 'more audience-centered' style of debate. Over time, membership in the NPDA grew as programs from at least five different styles of intercollegiate debate came together in competition, suggesting that a disparate set of ideas,

practices, and values merged in the NPDA. Thus, the only way for the NPDA to be successful in developing and proliferating the founders shared values, would be to have the organization build a cultural and attitudinal commitment to maintaining its central mission (Bodkin, et al., 2009).

**Organizational Cultural Leadership Discourse**

More than being a useful or interesting heuristic, understanding an organization's culture is necessary to understand its decision making since policy is unlikely to be made let alone enforced without the support of a culture that 'buys into' the policy agenda (Mills, 1995). While there is not an extensive amount of research explicitly examining the leadership culture connection, the findings consistently demonstrate these factors influence the outcomes of an organization (Banntu-Gomez & Rohrer, 2011). Banntu and Rohrer (2011) argued a leader's job, by definition, is managing meaning to drive the members understanding of the organization's values, purpose, and activities. If the leader communicates successfully, they build a narrative that is consistent with the members' view of the organization, thus building a loyal constituency. More than building support, the authors argue that the organization's work capacity will also grow. This suggests using the NPDA as a case study is an excellent way to analyze the leadership culture connection in organizations. Further, because culture is built and maintained in communicative practices, I propose that a cultural leadership discourse analysis of the NPDA will reveal valuable information in the study of the leadership culture connection in organizations. Previous research suggests there are three core principles connecting organizational culture and leadership: leaders shape organizational practices (e.g., Tesone, 2000); leadership connects to the routinization of an organization's culture (e.g., Beyer & Browning, 1999); and leaders serve a reflexive function to manage meaning (e.g., Sandler, 2009).

**Leaders' priorities shape organizational practice.** Mills (1995) analysis of diversity initiatives in British Airways found that not only do social and organizational discourses affect how people view their organizational realities, but that organizational leaders are critical in shaping those discourses. In emerging organizations, early leaders carry the weight of an organization's cultural formation, values, and preferences more so than leaders at any other point in the organization's development (Beyer & Browning, 1999). Additionally, one advantage strong leadership in mission-centered organizations have is that members are highly motivated by the organization's mission, which is strongly related to high levels of performance (Banntu-Gomez & Rohrer, 2011; Tesone, 2000). Tesone (2000) argues that when leaders use mission as a way to motivate members, their high level of emotional involvement produces high performance and identification with the organization. This suggests organizational leaders who successfully communicate and encourage the routinization of practices are more likely to have strong influence in their organizations.

**Routinization of organizational culture by members.** In a case study of a mission-based technology research organization, Beyer and Browning (1999)

found that because the managers implemented the founder's vision for the organization, it effectively cemented both the espoused values and routines as a part of everyday practice. In fact, Hatch (2000) argues leaders' power in organizations is necessarily limited by the extent to which their ideas, priorities, and values are routinized in the 'everyday' practices of organizational members. This suggests that if the members share a leader's organizational priorities, then there is likely to be a high level of similarity between the espoused mission and practices in the organization. However, the greater the level of incongruity between the members' vision of the organization and the espoused vision of the organization the greater the possibility for a disconnect between the mission and practices (Bodkin, et al., 2009; Hatch, 2000; Welleford & Dudley, 2000).

**Leaders serve a reflexive function to manage meaning.** Essentially, it is the leaders' responsibility to actively manage what an organization's mission is and how that relates to the daily work of the organization (Sandler, 2009). When well managed, an organizational mission helps organizations to maintain their identity and enforce standards within the organization (Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth, 1997). However, one of the primary tensions in organizational life lies between the organization's construction and the ongoing social process of cultural change and adaptation and in many ways who 'controls' how the organization changes and in what ways it changes (Fairhurst, 2001; Trice & Beyer, 1993). To effectively understand this dualism we should recognize that, 'regular' conversations within an organization are important artifacts of that culture (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001); that the social and organizational discourses affect how people view their organizational reality (Mills, 1995); and that most importantly organizational leaders can influence the organization's conversation (Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999; Bryman, 1999; Mills, 1995).

Boje, et al. (1999) explain that the 'hegemonic' force in an organization can serve to provide a grand narrative that links organizational work, organizational members, and can camouflage or even change the meaning of all the individual stories (i.e., different members interpretations of the organization). This hegemonic force is not necessarily the organization's leaders; however, leadership in organizations is largely about managing the meaning (Banntu-Gomez & Rohrer, 2011; Boin & Hart, 2003; Bryman, 1999). Bryman argues leadership manages meaning in organizations in three ways: first, good leadership is a process of influence or persuasion; second, these influence processes occur in a group context that either reaffirms the leader's interpretation or refutes it; and third, leaders influence group behaviors by directing the group towards organizational goals. Each of these functions manages the meaning not only of the organization but also of the ways that members' engage with the organization.

### Analyzing the NPDA's Formative Years
Given that previous research from 2004 (see Diers & Birkholt, 2004) found there is a strong disconnect between the espoused values of the NPDA and the practices in the organization and that previous organizational research suggests examining both the regular conversations (e.g., Eisenberg & Riley, 2001) as

well as the interpretation of the organization's mission and values from its leaders (e.g., Beyer & Browning, 1999; Bryman, 1999), to understand how the NPDA arrived at its present state of identity crisis, we should analyze the conversations that critically shaped the NPDA.

In most organizations, it would not be possible to examine this kind of information more than 15 years later; however, as a geographically dispersed organization, the NPDA has used discussion boards and listserves as its primary mode of communicating, outside of bi-annual meetings at the National Communication Association Annual Convention and the NPDA Championship Tournament. At present, much of the conversation about NPDA issues occurs on Net-Benefits; however, few of the organization's officers regularly participate in those conversations. While the parli-l today is used for little more than tournament and job announcements, from 1994 to 1999 it was used as an important location to address and discuss issues related to the organization, its rules and norms, as well as its governance. For example, in 1995 President Steve Johnson of Creighton University proposed alternative times for competition in NPDA and sought feedback using the parli-l. The NPDA uses those time limits today. In 1996, as a response to discussion about tournament procedures President Robert Trapp proposed and the community discussed national tournament rules using the parli-l. Those remain as the basis for the NPDA's rules. Finally, in 1997 as concerns regarding student conduct in debate rounds emerged and were debated on the parli-l, President Trapp responded by creating a Sexual Harassment Committee that ultimately produced the Sexual Harassment policies and procedures still used by the NPDA. Therefore, by examining the public archives[1] of the parli-l, we can conduct a cultural leadership discourse analysis of the NPDA and better understand the organizational reasons that the NPDA is presently facing an identity crisis and make recommendations for other forensics organizations.

**Data Collection and Analysis Methods**

The public archives of the parli-l from October, 1994 (when the list was opened) through March, 1999 were examined using a method of constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to use the previous literature as a source of comparison in the data (broadly on the organization's discussions about rules, norms, and procedures). Following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) procedures for conducting a constant comparison analysis, I first examined foundational literature on organizational culture and leadership to provide a point of comparison to the data because familiarity with relevant literature can enhance sensitivity to nuances in the data. Second, I used the systematic comparison of phenomena in order to analyze the messages from the parli-l to identify those relevant to issues of organizational culture formation and leadership, identifying 270 relevant messages. Messages from the same author that dupli-

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[1] The full archive of the NPDA "Parli-L" are located at:
https://lists.bethel.edu/mailman/private/parli. These are publicly available (with free subscription).

cated their initial posts were excluded in favor of focusing on new ideas for each major discussion thread emerging. Third, in analyzing the messages themselves, I used an open coding procedure focusing on a thematic analysis using each message as a unit of analysis to identify the overall themes communicated across the population. Once those themes were revealed, the messages were related to the model of leadership cultural discourse previously discussed.

### The NPDA's Early "Rules" and "Norms" Discussions

Based on the constant comparison approach, three broad categories of conversation amongst the members occurred: identification of the purposes or mission of the organization; discussions of tournament policies nor norms; and procedural announcements from the organization's leaders. Taken together, these conversations reflect a very strong trend—that despite active discussion and differences of opinion amongst the membership, the early leaders either refrained from taking a policy position on 'rules' or actively argued against creating or enforcing rules to maintain the organization's broad mission. In particular between 1995 and 1997, often discussions of specific topics or issues would ultimately end up in a "why rules" response from then President Robert Trapp. Later, after Trapp's presidency had ended as initiatives relating to issues such as coaching during preparation time or qualification procedures for the national tournament emerged, despite discussion or support for ideas from new NPDA leaders, tournament hosts, and students the early refusal to make and codify rules persisted suggesting that the early cultural norms and failure to routinize the mission of the organization offers the best explanation for the NPDA's current identity crisis and drift from its espoused mission. More specifically, this section will discuss each of the three content categories that emerged.

**The purpose of the NPDA as a focus for discussion**. From 1994 to 1995 there were a number of discussions that focused on the NPDA's mission and compared that purpose to other debate organizations—most notably the Cross Examination Debate Association—in order to try to more clearly define and discuss the nature of parliamentary debate. After 1994-1995, this 'mission-oriented' discussion became less prevalent and more of an appeal or argument in support of other initiatives later. However, what was interesting about the early mission discussions was the malleability of the practice of parliamentary debate, but with an inherent assumption that parliamentary debate was an activity with a clear and strong mission. The organizational leaders often emphasized concern that in our interest to define parliamentary debate, we should not strictly construct the activity because it could result in weakening the intellectual pursuits of the activity. Three posts—one from Ed Inch, then Director of Forensics at Pacific Lutheran University and future NPDA president; from Dr. Robert Trapp, Director of Forensics at Willamette University and future NPDA president; and from Steve Johnson, then Director of Forensics at Creighton University and NPDA president best reflect these assumptions.

I think that CEDA has made some mistakes among certain segments of its population.  Is the answer to ban or severly [sic] curtail one type of evidence?  Is that educationally sound?  Is that the objective of the NPDA to stress argumentation skills in all but one area?  It seems to me that the NPDA (or at least some members) is willing to chuck the kid with the bathwater.  Maybe the answer is not to by rule censor the students inventio [sic]…. As a community we need to think about what we are and how we define our mission.  I am very, very concerned with artificial rules that prevent students from exploring certain types of arguments and even more concerned when students come to think of evidence as "bad"…. I also endorse the idea of experimentation. NPDA is defining itself.  I hope it does not suffer from a "groupthink" mentality and believe that the current form is be best without experimenting and being open to other forms.  We should believe sufficiently in what we are duing [sic] to try different things (Ed Inch, parli-l post December 1, 1994).

In the first place, parliamentary debate has enjoyed worldwide popularity much longer than CEDA has even existed.  Second, we need to make parliamentary good debate on its own ground rather than try to form it as a contrast to some other form of debate that we dislike.  Thus, we shouldn't "ban evidence." (I agree with Ed Inch that banning evidence from argument is like saying you want to take a shower without getting wet.)  We need to focus on evidence as one form of support of an argument and should develop criteria what is good evidence and what is not…. As I said, my reading of the current "rules" to prohibit use of materials during the preparation period.  In fact, I don't believe NPDA has any rules--just a set of unofficial guidelines which were borrowed from one undergraduate debater from Mount Holyoke in 1991 (Robert Trapp, parli-l post February 15, 1995).

This position is consistant [sic] with the two other parliamentary debate governing bodies with which the NPDA has aligned itself.  Neither the APDA nor the World Debate Council allows the use of external evidence after the announcement of the resolution. Again, this is not a statement about how things *should be,* but rather about how they *are.*  I encourage the debate about this issue, and would further encourage those interested in moving the NPDA toward this format to propose this as a formal mandate (and, by the way, I would also encourage those that *oppose* this format to argue against such a proposed mandate) (Steve Johnson, February 24, 1995).

Overall, the mission and purpose of NPDA was not a strong primary area of conversation from 1995 to 1999; in fact, while some members used the mission (i.e., audience-centered accessible debate) as a source of support for ideas, the organization's leaders did not make the mission a central point of their posts nor a central point of support for policies communicated on the parli-l. This clearly stands in stark contrast to these same leaders' academic arguments and writings

regarding the purpose of the NPDA. Yet, what is also clear from these early posts is a strong dedication to a democratic organization where members can genuinely participate in shaping the organization, even to a point where the traditional 'conventions' associated with parliamentary debate, as it was practiced around the world, were questioned. For example, John Meany, Director of Forensics at Claremont Colleges wrote in December, 1997:

> There is so little written about parliamentary debate that I want to generate some listserv or backchannel commentary from the parliamentary debate community re practice. I am interested in justifications, rather than descriptions, of current practice. I want to begin with some of the obvious distinguishing characteristics of practice, including location and position of the subjects of the debate.
> 1. Why 'locate' the debate in parliament?
> 2. Why should the 'government' have a role in the debate?
> 3. Why should the opening proposition speaker be the 'Prime Minister'?

to which then president Robert Trapp responded:

> Good questions. I've thought about them and don't have any good reasons of my own for these conventions.

And while there was quite a bit of member conversation regarding the benefits and disadvantages of such conventions, the practical reality is that today these conventions are not typically practiced suggesting that without strong leadership support of organizational norms; those norms are unlikely to persist when questioned by some within the organization. This small example is endemic of the problem of the early NPDA leadership's unwillingness to advocate the organizational mission through routine interactions with the membership on the parli-l.

**The practice of parliamentary debate discussed.** The overwhelming majority of the posts on the parli-l from 1994-1999 focused on the in-round (and pre-round) practices of competitors, coaches, and judges with a range of topics actively discussed including rules about in-round argumentation, the use of evidence before and during the debate, expectations for attire, topics used for debate, 'canned' cases, mutual preference judging, low point wins, and sexual harassment/ safety in rounds. In large part, these conversations were coaches, judges, and competitors seeking to identify and discuss the appropriate norms for the performance of parliamentary debate in the NPDA.

One common topic of discussion throughout the years studied was the question of what was appropriate in terms of the use of resources during preparation time. The discussion evolved from Steve Johnson asking then Director of Forensics at Oregon State University Tricia Knapp to create a rule that allowed the use of a dictionary during prep time in 1995 to discussions of the use of 'extemp' files or personal notebooks continuing from 1995 through 1999. Standard practice today is that all evidence is appropriate to consult during preparation time, including an unwritten expectation that competitors should have access to the Internet during preparation time. So, absent clear policies one way or another,

clear organizational norms emerged supporting the use of evidence during preparation time.

An interesting issue related to preparation time was that of coaching during preparation time. In the early days of the NPDA, it was a cultural taboo—simply something that was not done and was not viewed as appropriate. Yet, over the years, that norm began to change. The conversation on the parli-l reflected the conversation over what could be accomplished and there was no clear consensus regarding what could be accomplished and there was even a strong sentiment against the practice communicated on the listserve; however, the question of the rule was an entirely separate matter. During the Johnson and Trapp presidencies, the issue was less relevant because of the aforementioned cultural norm; however, during Tom Kuster's (Director of Forensics at Bethany Lutheran College) presidency, the issue became more relevant as an issue relating to rules as the norms began to change. Therefore, as the issue became more important as a question of policy in 1998, the discussion on the parli-l reflected the split in the ideological perspectives with those arguing to support allowing coaching during preparation time as well as those opposing it. Students had voted on the issue for two consecutive years at the student meeting at the NPDA and the posts to the parli-l communicated an overwhelming opposition from students to 'allowing' coaching during preparation time. Additionally, the current president himself opposed coaching during prep time, even suggesting a tournament procedure to make it difficult to coach during preparation time, but he advocated against a rule because: "Lots of coaches don't like prep-time coaching to go on, but feel a rule against it can't be enforced" (February 8, 1998). Yet, despite leadership, a good number of coaches, and overwhelming student opposition to coaching during preparation time, no official NPDA rule ever came to be.

Based on my reading of the archives, we can trace the strong sentiments against rule adoption regarding competitive norms to Robert Trapp's presidency, which was a critical time in the formation of the event. Johnson's presidency focused on the first few years of organizing and standardizing basic practices. Once the organization was stable and growing during Trapp's presidency—expanding members beyond those with initial mission 'buy-in'—genuine questions of policy began to emerge and Trapp remained consistent in his arguments against creating rules to preserve the mission and identify of the NPDA as supporting debate that was audience-centered and adaptive to 'any' audience.

The best illustration of this point was in 1995 just before Trapp presented the official tournament procedures still in use today, there had been an active discussion about the use of rules to make the activity clear and keep it accessible for all audiences and new debaters. Of course, there were many advocates on all sides of the discussion; however, as the discussion progressed there emerged a strong call for rules to make the activity clear:

> Overlooked in the discussion of specific, proscriptive rules has been one rather significant issue. This is, of course, the cost of entry into NPDA events. I teach at a rather small regional university…. What the above means is that these folks are not real high on a "with-itness" scale. They are very con-

scious about fitting in, about appearing to have a clue. Rules help them do that. For that reason, their favorite debate event is NFA-LD, which follows very specific rules and spells them out clearly in a single page brochure…. Concrete rules let them debate the topic and let them know what to expect. That is a huge advantage. They are not interested in playing debater games; they are interested in arguing about the resolution, challenging others' reasoning and defending their own. Rules might give them a chance to do that. One other advantage: rules level the playing field, or at least grade it on the basis of insight into the resolution rather than familiarity with debating at tournaments. Rules make debate theory discussions moot (oin [sic] most cases), because they allow even a lay judge to fairly interpret challenges and violations. Thus rules based debate may be expected to more fully focus on the resolution (Bob Greenstreet, then Director of Forensics at East Central University, November 28, 1995).

Following this discussion, Trapp agreed that the activity's clarity did facilitate better competition, posting the tournament rules[2] that would be enacted for the 1996 National Tournament (and largely remain unchanged to this day). Though these tournament procedures did not address many advocates' arguments about the real need for clarity on the purpose and identity of the activity—a point discussed on the parli-l, Trapp ultimately clarified his intentions for the rules, clearly indicating that he felt the procedural rules that were put in place were all that were needed for the NPDA to operate effectively:

I want to express my appreciation to all of the people who gave constructive comments on my draft of the 1996 NPDA Championship Tournament Rules. I have used those comments to revise the rules. Today I am mailing a packet containing these rules, the tournament invitation, and other materials to all member schools. At this time I want to express my intentions about these rules. (1) The purpose of these rules is to define the procedures of the debate so that, to the extent possible, everyone will enter the debates with a shared set of expectations…. (2) I view these rules as expanding, not limiting, the choices that debaters can make….(3) In framing this set of rules, I have, to the best of my ability, tried to preserve the procedures that we have all come to expect….I hope the rules are received in the spirit in which they are intended--to create a shared set of expectations and a level playing field--not as a method of restricting and punishing debaters. Again, I appreciate everyone's input in the process of creating these rules (February 1, 1996).

The most important component of Trapp's response is his second intention regarding the rules to emphasize that he, personally, did not believe in limiting the

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[2] Posting of the National Tournament procedures in Trapp's post are at: https://lists.bethel.edu/mailman/private/parli/1996-February/021047.html

choices that debaters can make. This point was reiterated in a number of posts both before and after this statement about the procedures:

> In my opinion, the only support for their (i.e., time-space shifts in use must be on a debate-by-debate basis (October 5, 1995).

> I could easily be convinced that NPDA needs a set of clear rules of procedure. The rules should be clear enough to avoid the overreach of enforcement. A rule that says "debaters should speak at a reasonable rate of speed" is not clear because various judges would interpret it in various ways and worse, the existence of such a rule would give licenze [sic] to some to punish students with more zeal than is necessary. Rules should be about procedures, not about arguments (November 26, 1995).

> I do NOT favor any additional rules regarding coaching or use of materials during prep time. I don't want to see tabrooms (especially the NPDA nationals tabroom) become involved in disputes about enforcement of this or other practices ouside [sic] of the debates. I also don't want to get into disputes and potential enforcement of questions like what constitutes coaching (asking the coach where the bathroom is, a coach wishing the team good luck, etc).… **But, my primary reaction is that I don't want to become a rules cop** (September 8, 1995**).**
> On Mon, 13 Apr 1998, Jon Loging wrote: *NPDA community, We should debate the case in front of us, and not the rule book.*

> My nomination for the best post of the year!!! (April 13, 1998).

In Trapp's arguments against rules, he even suggested that existing argumentative rules be removed:
> Can someone give me a good reason why points of order should not be
> dropped from the rules of parliamentary debate (September 23, 1997).

This suggests very strongly that from 1994-1999 Robert Trapp, president for much of that period, was very clearly an advocate against creating rules regarding the practice of parliamentary debate at a time that the organization was defining itself, its strongest organizational values, and creating normative practices for the activity. In fact, the issue of rules related to the practice of parliamentary debate was the most consistent topic on which Trapp posted during this time. Consequently, because of his position of leadership, identification as a "founder", and early opinion leadership his positions often set the tone for the conduct of the organization's business and identity. This was, as Boje, et al. (1999) really identified as the hegemonic voice in the organization and he exercised his voice on the issue of rules most consistently.

**Rules and procedure announcements.** The final predominant discussion theme centered around the organization's leadership using the parli-l to spread important information about the organization, changes in the organization, or

ideas for the organization. Most of the time, these discussions were surrounded by discussions of debate practice, so the leaders took the opportunity to either take action or communicate action taken in a topically relevant format. For example, in response to concerns regarding government versus opposition advantage, Steve Johnson used the list serve to announce the new times that would be used at the 1995 NPDA National Tournament and seek feedback. He also used the parli-l to identify procedures related to the use of dictionaries in rounds previously discussed. Additionally, Johnson used the parli-l as a source of feedback on the activity in its earliest days of formation. Trapp also used the parli-l in the same way to offer tournament procedures to be enacted for 1996, to respond to community concerns regarding sexual harassment by forming a sexual harassment committee and announcing the NPDA policy on sexual harassment in 1997 and 1998. Additionally, the parli-l was used to identify limitation issues on team entry for the 1998 and 1999 national tournaments. All of these topics certainly generated conversation, but demonstrated the organization's leadership using the parli-l as a source of communication about changes and policies within the organization.

#### Discussion of the Emergent NPDA Culture and Leadership

Taken together, an analysis of the discourse and discussions of the members and leaders of the NPDA from 1994-1999 strongly demonstrate that in a geographically dispersed organization, like the NPDA, we can learn much about the leadership culture connection in organizations. In the case of the NPDA, the discussions from the mid-to-late 1990's still affect the organization even a decade later. Clearly, the largest portion of the story that I have told has been the story of the leaders' communication and interaction on the parli-l and that by no means suggests the organization has been guided by an iron fist; quite the contrary, because the leaders invited participation and discussion using the listserve as a way to interrogate issues of policy for the organization, there was much participation in the organization's development. However, when we apply an analysis of the cultural leadership discourse, we find the leaders' discourse strongly influenced the decision-making during the organization's formation, even under-cutting decision-making after those leaders were no longer in office. Therefore, this section will analyze the progression of the NPDA's policy making through the lens of the cultural leadership discourse analysis discussed earlier.

#### Leader Priorities Shape Organizational Practice

Organizational culture and leadership research suggests leaders shape discourse (Mills, 1995), early leaders most affect the organization's development (Beyer & Browning, 1999), and that what those leaders encourage or discourage matters (Tesone, 2000). The NPDA's early leadership set a clear stage for the issues that were appropriate issues of NPDA policy. The analysis of the routine discussions on the parli-l clearly demonstrates a disdain for 'rules' or even normative proscriptions that could have maintained the organization's identity. Instead, the leadership preferred a model that allowed the debaters and judges to

construct the meaning of the event within the rounds of debate. Robert Trapp's arguments against rules and preference for in-round construction of arguments, evidence, and practices was the most influential both because of the timing of his tenure as president of the NPDA as well as because of his consistency of response on the parli-l opposing such measures. Considering this, there is then a strong measure of irony in his post from 2010 (see Appendix A) and his reflection on the final round of debate in 2010 as something that would give cause for concern, both because of the substance of the debate but also as a reflection of public discourse at a larger level because his very clear 'debate it out' philosophy has dominated NPDA practice and policy making.

Yet, even without a strong desire for official policy making to enforce the organization's mission, there was little evidence of the NPDA leadership's advocacy for the NPDA's mission on the parli-l. However, there were clear articulations of the mission's support outside of the parli-l by these same leaders, as previously discussed. This supports the organizational research indicating that the most important cultural discourse is that which occurs because of regular interactions within an organization's boundaries—either physical or electronic. This also demonstrates that if the NPDA's leaders wanted to keep the mission relevant for the members—particularly as the organization was experiencing its first substantial growth between 1994 and 1999—that they had to take an active role in setting the activity's priorities and failed to do so.

Beyond the case of the NPDA, these findings strongly suggest that in mission-based organizations, even ones with vocal member participation, the leader is the central figure in developing and shaping all forms of the organization's culture. This is consistent with previous research, but gives longitudinal evidence supporting the lasting effects of the formative leadership cultural connection. Yet, the most theoretically rich finding is that when and where leaders advocate for the mission of the organization matters. Members of the NPDA knew these leaders strongly advocated audience-centered debate—it was a small community—yet, the leaders' "outside" advocacy (i.e., publishing critiques) for the importance of audience-centered debate did not translate to lasting values and norms. This suggests the timing and location of leaders' communication of identity and shared values matters.

### Routinization by Organizational Members

Organizational cultural researchers have found everyday practice by members strongly affects the organization's development (Beyer & Browning, 1999) and if members and leaders share priorities there is likely to be a strong overlap between mission and practices (Hatch, 2000; Welleford & Dudley, 2000). The analysis of the NPDA reveals there were essentially two NPDA organizational cultures—the de jure and de facto cultures. The de jure culture focuses on public argumentation that is accessible to audiences, critics, and competitors no matter their background in debate and the de facto culture focuses on an organic growth of the activity—something where the meaning of the activity is really co-created by normative practices. This may seem perfectly normal to many; however, what makes the NPDA novel in the 'organic' model of organizational culture

development is that where most organizational researchers would identify a disconnect between leaders and members goals, the leaders lead the charge for the socially constructed organization—seemingly no matter the cost in terms of the mission of the organization.

Consequently, Diers and Birkholt's (2004) findings that there was a strong disconnect between the espoused values of the NPDA and those reinforced by coaches, judges, and competitors with their in-round preferences are well-grounded by the conversations occurring in the formative years of the NPDA. Essentially, the routinization of the NPDA's values by its members had little to do with the mission and purpose of the organization and much more to do with a philosophical commitment to open the activity to such a point that it had no clear identity nor direction; instead, it was socially constructed by an increasingly technical group of debaters and coaches as more schools left the Cross Examination Debate Association and the National Debate Tournament activities. Those voices were comparatively louder than the members favoring the original mission of the activity indicating that the routinization of debate practices was dominated by an organic social construction that stood in direct competition with the initial mission. Based in this analysis, I believe it is clear that the groundwork for this shift was laid in the conversations about the identity and prevailing approach to governing the NPDA in the early years of the organization. Conceptually, this demonstrates that consistency in advocacy and managing practices is may be more important than merely managing the grand narrative of the organization. If leaders primarily focus on celebrating the grand narrative of their organization instead of attending to the practices in the organization, there is likely to be a disconnect between the two.

**Leaders Serve a Reflexive Function to Manage Meaning**

Foundational research in a cultural evaluation of leadership suggests it is organizational leaders' responsibility to actively manage the organization's mission and that mission's relationship to daily routines (Fairhurst, et al., 1997) because "regular" conversations reflect what is important in the organization (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001), and leaders provide the grand narrative linking the organization, its work, and its members (Boje, et al., 1999; Mills, 1995). As I have previously argued, the analysis of the early parli-l discussions clearly indicate the early organizational leaders and de facto opinion leaders in the NPDA were poor stewards of the NPDA's mission and that their grand narrative not only showed clear deference to an organically created and maintained organizational culture, but with a rigorous and consistent refutation of normative rules or policies, created a hegemonic silencing force against members who wanted to take action to clearly define and defend the organization's mission. The first president argued for a vigorous discussion of what the NPDA would mean and how its practices would develop; however, the second president's advocacy was much more directional often ending conversations about policy-related issues with the pronouncement of a procedural change or a denunciation of normative rule making. In combination, instead of actively identifying the purpose of the organization and asking questions about how that purpose could be maintained,

the first two presidents opened the conversation about the nature of the activity and then not only seemed to actively avoid posting to support the organization's mission in rules or policy related conversations, but went a step further as the organization developed to oppose any policy-based efforts to maintain the organization's mission.

This suggests that as the organization rapidly grew, new members and an organizational discourse that actively encouraged the 'make-it-up-as-we-go' model of "debating it out in rounds" quickly outnumbered the small group of founding members with a clear understanding and support for the organization's mission. Absent in the NPDA's development were organizational leaders that actually served a strong reflexive function to manage the meaning of organic debating interests in terms of the purpose of the activity. Bryman (1999) argued leaders can exert influence in group contexts that either reaffirms or refutes interpretations of the organization's purpose and culture and that leaders influence group behaviors by directing the group towards the organization's cultures. This analysis of discussions on the parli-l related to rules, policy, and vision for the NPDA clearly suggests this essential leadership function was conspicuously absent. Often in the cultural leadership literature (Trice & Beyer, 1993) specifically and the organizational leadership literature more broadly (Witherspoon, 1996), the work is framed by an explicit disconnect between leadership (the big-picture) and management (the day-to-day). The leadership culture connection identified in this analysis suggests it may be a mistake to separate leadership and management functions within an organization.

## Placing the NPDA in the Context of Intercollegiate Forensics and Leadership

The case of the NPDA is illustrative for both the study of the leadership culture connection as well as for forensics organizations. There are three theoretically rich findings emerging from this case that should be evaluated with additional research. First, leaders must be advocates for their organization's identity and culture within their organizations, not merely outside of their organizations. These findings demonstrate that even if the membership knows what the leaders believe in, unless those values are actively communicated in the interactions within the organization, they are not likely to emerge as shared values over time. Second, the 'grand narrative' of any organization only matters if the routine practices of the organization are consistent with the grand narrative. Cultural disconnects between the two must be actively managed or the grand narrative is ultimately likely to be irrelevant. Related and finally, as modern organizations expand where physical boundaries are less rigid, the line between leadership and management functions may be blurred. These data suggest if leaders fail to attend to the practices in the organization, they may lose control of their organizations in the long-term.

For the NPDA more directly, the NPDA has developed an organization that is/was appealing to many Directors of Forensics, as evidenced by the number of member organizations and continued large entry at the national tournament. Yet, one question I have explored is, 'has the NPDA created a definable and sustain-

able style of debate for intercollegiate competition?' and I believe the answer must be a clear no for a couple of reasons. First, the organization lacks a clear identity and subscription to an overall set of shared values; instead, what is valued in the activity is an artificial notion of intellectual freedom that masks a strongly routinized set of practices (see Diers & Birkholt, 2004). For those interested in supporting those routinized practices, including the style of argumentation that Trapp commented on in his 2010 "musings" about the final round of debate, there is no conflict and no problem with the current evolution of the activity. However, for others, there is strong conflict most notably evidenced by the 2008 Kirksville conference that brought together NPDA leaders concerned with the de facto practices. However, I believe the effort to shift the NPDA's culture after this conference have a limited potential to be effective because of the dominant culture in the activity developed with the early leaders and routinized over the years.

Second, the inherently malleable nature of argumentative preferences and style of debate make the NPDA unsustainable in the long term. Directors have been drawn to the NPDA since 1994 for a host of reasons; however, since 2001 the NPDA has seen substantial changes in the membership including many new schools, but also losing many schools. Furthermore, the emergence of the National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence (NPTE), backlash against mutual preference judging, increasing rates of delivery, and a litany of other issues have begun to genuinely divide the membership as competitive visions of what parliamentary debate should look like become less compatible with one another. These issues are all a direct consequence of the organization's inability/unwillingness to create policy and govern the organization in line with the espoused mission or values of the activity.

As a result, it seems incredibly likely that the membership of the NPDA will continue to fracture based on pedagogical and ideological lines until the organization shrinks to a body of like-minded individuals and/or the organization splits into multiple organizations each pursing their own preferences. Unfortunately, in a world of tight college resources and increased pressure for nationally-recognized performance, it becomes more difficult to position participation and success in the NPDA as being financially worthwhile when the activity is either antithetical to its mission or so small that a is it no longer a broad-based national organization with the participation it has long boasted. Now, absent the organic construction of the NPDA (i.e., with a strong set of policies), it is entirely likely that the membership and participation in the activity would have been smaller—much like the National Forensics Association's participation in Lincoln Douglas Debate (NFA LD)[3]. However, there would have likely been a stronger similarity between the mission and practice of the activity, as we see in NFA LD today—an organization that has maintained much of its membership and slowly, but steadily, grown over the last couple of decades.

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[3] NFA-LD has and tries to enforce a strongly proscriptive set of rules dictating the dominant approach to the activity. See http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/comm/nfa/ldrules.html for more information.

   In the end, it does not matter very much whether we like or dislike the NPDA in its early, middle, or contemporary forms. However, I believe there is a strong lesson in the NPDA's failures for other forensics organizations and forensics educators. The leaders of forensics organizations must be leaders and actively manage their organizations. I can appreciate many forensics educators' interests in encouraging student learning and creativity; however, organizational structure and clarity are not antithetical to student learning and creativity. This is why in our classrooms we set policies; why on our teams we set policies; and why in our forensics organizations sometimes we have to be 'rules cops'. In the end, if we want our forensics organizations to last, be credible, be manageable, and support particular educational and competitive outcomes then leaders must not only keep the mission relevant to members, but actively structure and develop policies and practices that support the mission. A clear and strong set of enforced rules leave the focus of the activity the content and performances instead of structurally forcing meta-debate as the activity is co-created in practice—something that the NPDA has not just allowed but forced with its organic structure and approach. In short, we must learn from and apply organizational and communication research to the good management of our forensics organizations.

### Appendix A
https://lists.bethel.edu/mailman/private/parli/2010-March/040966.html
musings
Robert Trapp trapp at willamette.edu
*Tue Mar 23 16:59:45 CDT 2010*

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I'd like to start by congratulating team from Pepperdine and Texas Tech on their success in getting to the finals at NPDA.  As a not-so-recent  alumni of Texas Tech, I am especially proud of the results they have  achieved in the "Joe Gantt Era."  Both teams were very talented and  clearly demonstrated that they did the kind of work needed to get to these high levels of national competition.

With the successes of these two teams in my mind, I prepared to get on the airplane in Lubbock this morning and picked up a newspaper to occupy my time. In that paper I read that "Sen. John McCain and other Republicans have promised to slow the process down through procedural objections."  The parallel was just too stark for me to ignore.  In this case, the Republicans have been unable to engage the issue of health reform on its substance, so they turn to procedural arguments as a method to obstruct the debate on the substantive issues."  If they can't win of the substantive issues in the debate, they resort to procedure in an attempt to silence their opponents. Don't get me wrong; although Republicans are guilty of this kind of obstructionist debate today, Democrats have used these tactics before.

I know that some say the point of academic debate is simply to teach and to learn "critical thinking."  And given that singular goal, debating about procedure instead of substance is no different.  But aren't we also trying to teach and learn

about civic engagement as well? And if so, do we really want to reward obstructionist procedural tactics over substantive debate? I suppose one could say that we need to understand procedural tactics in order to learn to overcome them. Fair enough, but I think it's naïve to say that this is the point of what we are doing. We're not engaged in an effort to use procedural arguments to force attention on substance. We're actively engaging procedural arguments as a way to avoid substance.

Perhaps these are simply the musings of an "old buffalo" who just doesn't have the ability to "keep up." I have to say though that these procedural arguments that I have heard aren't really complicated or nuanced enough to do justice to the intellectually powerful students I observed this weekend. From one point of view, the "procedural turn" in
debate seems quite parallel to the Republican Party tactics of today (and Democratic tactics of other times) that have made public debate so vitriolic and obstructionist.

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